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MAR 2 8 1963

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TO : EE - Mr. Harriman

FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

SUBJECT: Dissidence in Communist China

In reviewing isolated reports of dissidence in Communist China, we are struck by the inadequacy of our intelligence and the fact that such dissidence has occurred on a major scale without our discovering the event until many months afterward. This paper examines instances of rebellion against the mainland regime and analyzes related intelligence problems.

ABSTRACT

Chinese Communist controls over communication within mainland China, as well as between the mainland and the outside world, have effectively concealed the outbreak of violence from our detection until long after such outbreaks are suppressed. Between 1960 and 1963, at least three such instances occurred, each requiring military action to restore authority. While the regime's ability to control dissidence has been amply proven to date, our ignorance of the actual situation at any given time cautions against assuming that, in the absence of immediate and confirmed evidence, there is no effective challenge to Peiping's authority throughout the length and breadth of mainland China. Further exploration of additional intelligence approaches may improve our ability to detect and respond to changing conditions in this vast area.

Peiping's Concealment of Dissidence

We have observed on a number of occasions that the Chinese Communist regime exercises strong and effective control over its population and that popular dissidence and discontent are unlikely to threaten its stability, at least under present conditions. This does not mean that serious outbreaks of popular unrest have not occurred, however. China's vast area, its teeming millions, and the regime's total control over all effective means of communication have enabled it to isolate, suppress, and frequently to conceal such incidents even from persons in neighboring areas.

Our intelligence on such incidents of armed protest against the regime on the mainland is extremely poor and invariably comes long after the incidents have been brought under control. It is almost wholly dependent on refugee reports which in all but a few instances are themselves three, four or more steps removed from the alleged incidents. Thus within the last year or so,

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we have learned of several significant, even major, incidents of mass disturbances on the mainland, all of which occurred six months or more before we received the information. What appears to have been the most serious of these has never been reported by any mainland refugee or letter; the lesser affairs we have on the authority of only a handful of refugee reports. Each incident apparently involved the use of substantial numbers of Chinese Communist troops (whether regular army or Public Security we are not sure) and resulted in both military and civilian casualties.

But for chance we might still be ignorant of these disturbances in mainland China. During the last three years there may have been many more outbreaks of dissidence, perhaps on an even larger scale, about which we are still unaware. The "railroad riot" in Canton on June 1, 1962, in which over 10,000 persons rioted out of control, overturned the jeep of the vice-mayor of the city, and paralyzed civilian police before being dispersed by regular troops, was a rare example of an incident which came readily to our attention because of the proximity of Canton to Hong Kong and the constant flow of refugees from this area. As in most rural areas, however, stories of uprisings or dissidence spread by word of mouth, are inevitably both long out of date and dramatically distorted by the time they reach their last ear, and consequently become merely titillating bits of gossip with probably little effect on the actions or attitudes of the people.

Major Outbreaks against Local Authority

Excluding Tibet, the most significant disturbances we have identified during the last two years are as follows:

1. Honan, late 1960: According to secret Chinese Communist army documents which only became available at the end of 1961, a major breakdown of authority occurred in the Nanyang Special Administrative District of southern Honan province, an area with a population of nearly 10 million. The secret documents described the disturbances as an "incident," a pale word in English but which in Chinese is invariably used only to describe serious disturbances where blood is shed.

Civil authorities, militia, and peasants apparently engaged in mass violations of regime directives and programs, the pilfering of state property and installations, blockading of communications lines, and attacks on cadres. Similar problems but probably on a lesser scale erupted approximately the same time in virtually every one of the five other special administrative districts in Honan. Although we do not know precisely how Peiping suppressed the disturbances in Honan, the major attention given them by this important army publication strongly suggests that troops suppressed the dissidence. These incidents appear to have been a prime factor in the regime's grave concern over political stability in the winter of 1960-61. (See FE-RFE-38, "The Tibetan Documents")

Although the Ilchyang district lies directly athwart one of the two main north-south rail lines from Peiping to the Yangtze valley, not a single report of the disturbances has ever reached us through other sources.

2. Tsinghai, 1961-62: According to a refugee from Tsinghai, serious riots occurred at Kweite (about 50 miles south of Sining, the provincial capital) early in 1961. Grain warehouses were looted and troops had to be called to restore order. The Communist Party's First Secretary for the province was allegedly dismissed from his position following the disturbances, a report which is lent credibility by the disappearance of public references to this official after April 1961.

According to another refugee, there was large-scale looting of state farm grain fields by commune members (apparently mostly Tibetans) in the same general region -- Kweite and the areas immediately south -- at the time of the autumn harvest in 1961. Two regiments of armed troops were called in to halt the looting but, according to the report, it continued sporadically until "the end of the harvest in February 1962." This same source also alleged that in mid-February 1962, "several hundred Tibetans" raided grain warehouses about 150 miles south of Sining.

Several obstacles impede evaluation of these reports. The second source was in the general vicinity of the rioting described by the first source at the time it allegedly occurred but made no reference to it. Moreover, several other sources from the area where rioting was described by both the reports make no mention of such disturbances. Finally, the grain harvest in Tsinghai almost always ends in October; it is inconceivable that harvesting would still be in progress as late as February. We are persuaded that disturbances similar to those described took place but the details may be unreliable. These incidents may provide an excellent example of the regime's ability to insulate neighboring areas from each other when such events occur.

3. Sinkiang, 1962: From two separate refugee reports, it appears that between early March and early May 1962, a large number (perhaps 70,000) of minority nationals in northwestern Sinkiang (the Ili and T'a-ch'eng [Tugyechal] areas) fled with substantial numbers of livestock into Soviet territory. In addition, another report states that thousands of national minority residents of Kuldja (I-ning) rioted in that city last August, with at least twelve rioters killed.* These reports came ultimately through refugees from the areas involved or through letters from residents of the areas.

* See RM-IFR-21, "Sino-Soviet Border Dispute Reaches New Pitch."

A subsequent report provides a version of these incidents as told to a refugee from Kunming, some 600 miles to the east in Sinkiang. This presents a detailed picture of the incidents in a way which might be accurate but, could equally well be a distorted account of the original stories. According to this version, 60,000 Kazakhs in the Ili and T'a-ch'eng areas rioted in March 1962. The rioters were armed with guns, killed cadres, and looted and burned granaries, farms, and ammunition dumps. Finally they were suppressed by Chinese Communist troops with the survivors fleeing with their loot -- mostly sheep -- into the Soviet Union where they were welcomed with open arms. The elements of riot, suppression by troops, and flight with livestock to the Soviet Union are common to the previous reports when lumped together but no single one of the previous reports contains all elements.

Rumor Versus Fact

The Honan story may have been based on a core of truth around which details were distorted, separate outbreaks were capsulated into a single incident, and the time framework altered. When one considers we might well have had only this version to work from, the difficulty of evaluating even more hazy accounts of incidents and resistance becomes more obvious. For example, how does one appraise the isolated account transmitted by a Honan resident from a peddler in Changsha, Honan who, in June 1961, claimed to have been among a handful who survived a massacre of 80,000 persons in an uprising in southwestern Honan province, some 500 miles distant, in late 1960? The uprising was allegedly triggered by food shortages, lasted a month, and required four battalions of troops for its suppression. There are no corroborating reports whatsoever of such an incident. Or what is the credibility of an isolated refugee report in late-1960 from a former resident of Tsingtao, Shantung to the effect that the mountainous areas of Shantung harbored substantial numbers of anti-regime dissidents? We know that Shantung has been a problem province for the regime for years and that the Chinese Communist Party First Secretary in the province was dismissed before December 1960. We also know from secret military documents that Shantung, like Honan, was one of the most serious famine areas in 1960 and, by implication, that some of the dissidence problems in Honan probably also existed in Shantung. Thus if the First Secretary of Tsinghai was actually dismissed for his inability to cope with dissidence, his counterpart in Shantung may have suffered a similar fate.

Such reports become more credible in retrospect as parallel accounts receive partial or circumstantial confirmation. Nevertheless, none can be accepted on their face value and all must be viewed against the impressive ability the regime has shown not only to suppress those uprisings of which we have heard, but to prevent knowledge of their occurrence to filter beyond the immediate area of dissidence. This control so far has outweighed the dissidence. Nonetheless, our ignorance of the actual situation at any given time cautions against assuming that, in the absence of immediate and confirmed evidence, there is no effective challenge to Peiping's authority throughout

Further Intelligence Efforts

Without exhaustively "brainstorming" the matter, we have explored a few additional ways in which intelligence efforts might provide more timely and accurate information on dissidence in Communist China. To be sure, imaginative approaches concentrated on such a high priority target as China's nuclear weapon program have admittedly fallen short of requirements and we have no confidence that the basic obstacles imposed by Peiping's controlled communications can be overcome to any appreciable extent. However, the knowledge of past dissidence and its possible future relationship to the vulnerabilities available to us in such eventualities as possible renewed Chinese Communist aggression against India warrants a comprehensive and systematic examination of the collection problem.

For instance, two of the three cases of dissidence during 1961-62 which we know about occurred in traditional areas of national minority revolt against Chinese rule, Tsinghai and Sinkiang. Because of its prominence, the Tibetan revolt has been left outside our immediate focus but of course is most relevant. Finally, scattered data indicates at least individual cases of defection by Mongols from the Chinese side of the border crossing into Outer Mongolia. Seen against this background, the swiftness with which Peiping has moved to negotiate border agreements with Outer Mongolia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in 1962-63 appears dictated as much by internal security requirements as by the external need of isolating India as China's sole public border disputant.

The situation in selected national minority areas might be explored through several channels. Pakistan provides a promising point for concentrating on Sinkiang developments because of its common border across which travel traders, nomads, as well as refugees. Sharing the Muslim faith with Sinkiang's predominantly Turki populace, Pakistani officials should have an additional interest beyond that of a U.S. ally in determining levels of dissidence in adjacent communist territory. Except for its nonalignment posture, Afghanistan might provide similar points of advantage, albeit to a lesser degree given its far shorter border with Communist China. During the Sinkiang revolts in the mid-thirties, Kabul was an important listening post for Japanese and British authorities. Reports of an exodus in 1961-1962 from Sinkiang into Afghanistan, perhaps numbering in the hundreds of refugees, suggest the possibility of further collection efforts here, perhaps through Turkish or Iranian channels.

In the absence of provincial newspapers, greater reliance should be placed on monitoring regional and local broadcasts. At present most of South China is uncovered, much less the more remote regions of the interior. Such coverage as occurs of Sinkiang broadcasts, for instance, is fragmentary, initial assignment to monitoring oblivious to meaningful changes of emphasis or programming, and raw data is destroyed after a few months retention. Increased coverage, more effort to develop indicators of local unrest, and longer

retention of monitored material might improve this means of penetrating the communications curtain which presently conceals much of mainland China from our view.

Additional monitoring facilities might be acquired through Pakistani and Indian cooperation. This overt collection would raise fewer questions of a sensitive nature than might be associated with other activities. The altitude and proximity of listening posts stationed in Ladakh and the Hunza should be helpful for coverage of local broadcasts in the entire northwest to southwest arc of national minority areas in China.

Mail might be also used as an indicator of dissidence when the normal flow from a particular area suddenly decreases precipitously for a discernible period. Without opening the correspondence, postmarks from selected areas of likely tension could be tabulated at points of likely passage -- Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok, to take three U.S.-allied points as a sample -- and trend-lines established whose interruption might signal a disruption of local communications in the area. Other techniques could then focus intensively upon the suspect locality. Refugee interrogations could retrospectively attempt more systematic examination for related information.

Travelers to the West might wander more widely in the Central Asian republics bordering China where observations and conversations could probe for indicators of recent migration from the East. Knowledge of defectors crossing into Outer Mongolia came through conversations with Mongol delegates to the 1960 International Orientalist Conference in Moscow. Similar situations might be exploited on a higher priority basis than heretofore established. Outer Mongolia itself could serve as a listening post through the cooperation of the United Kingdom and India, were both to establish permanent legations in Ulan Bator. Japanese interest in and travel to Outer Mongolia might provide still another channel of information.

Throughout this extensive arc of national minority areas, traditional resistance to Chinese rule is compounded by Peiping's radical restructuring of social and economic institutions. An intelligence focus on this area should provide a composite picture of disaffection, actual and potential, extending from Inner Mongolia through the northwest provinces of Kansu, Tsinghai, and Sinkiang, down across Tibet, to the strategic province of Yunnan which abuts Burma, Laos, and North Vietnam. Closer tracking of unrest would permit more immediate and fruitful reactions -- provided prior contingency planning had furnished the wherewithal -- in the event of renewed Chinese Communist aggression against India, intervention in Laos, or military pressures elsewhere. Peiping's communications lines to most points on its remote southern and western borders traverse forbidding mountain and desert where interdiction

and harrassment by local guerrillas can inflict a relatively high toll for the investment involved. Muslim marauders who believe that their greatest accomplishment is to die for the faith against the infidel accept being expendable and therefore fight against great odds. Certain Tibetan, Mongol, and other groups have shown tremendous courage and skill in resisting outside rule.

No Chinese regime has wholly pacified these national minorities in the past century. Peiping continues to have its troubles here, although its control is obviously far greater than that of previous governments. In view of the unsatisfactory economic conditions which seem certain to prevail for some years to come, and the potential disruption of leadership which may follow the death of Mao, further dissidence is certainly possible, not only among the national minorities but elsewhere as well. We do not believe such dissidence alone will topple the regime. However, its existence should be known, its import evaluated at the time, and its implications for U.S. policy related to the then existing actions of Communist China.

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